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ABSTRACT

Despite remedial programs and innovative practices, traditional education has not met the compelling need for increasing access to higher education for minority and other educationally disadvantaged students. Financial, geographical, scheduling, and degree requirement barriers still exist which prevent older adults, military personnel, the handicapped, full-time employees, and married women from taking advantage of educational opportunities. The removal of existing barriers and the development of relevant new programs are two essential steps in making educational opportunity available to a broader segment of the population. One program that might be considered as an example of an alternative structure for delivery of higher education services is the College II Program at Morgan State University. Students accepted into this program are given the option to enroll in independent study courses and receive academic credit for their previous work experience. Strong emphasis is placed on student self-direction. Learning contracts are used to encourage self-direction and a six-stage model for assessment is used to recognize and evaluate students' prior experience. (Author/EB)

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Abstract of Presentation

Strategies for Implementing Experiential Educational Programs in a Predominantly Black Institution

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The compelling need for increasing access to higher education for minority and other educationally disadvantaged students requires the provision of alternative structures for delivery of higher education services as a significant step in the removal of one barrier for this group.

The purpose of this symposium will be to examine a model for experiential education utilizing a mix of learning modes in an alternative program.

Morgan State University, like many predominantly Black Colleges, was founded to provide college education for those who might otherwise have been deprived of that opportunity. Recently, the University has found a new opportunity for its services, one which adds a new dimension to all its past accomplishments.

This presentation will examine the model of the Special Services Project (College II Program at Morgan State University), which operates as an alternative program for undergraduate education. Students accepted into the program are given the option to enroll in independent study courses and receive academic credit for this grantifiable aspect of their previous work experience.

This workshop is intended for administrators, faculty, and counselors who work in settings where the enrollment consists of a significant number of adult minority students.

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Text of Presentation

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, educators have begun to recognize that a University must not merely be an institution of higher education where a variety of academic disciplines is uniformly appropriated. Increasingly, the standard for uniformity in educational methods is yielding to more individualized nontraditional approaches. As a consequence, the University begins to emerge as a context for learning in a variety of ways, thereby expanding its constituency and increasing the chances that a student will more fully exploit his own potential for advanced formal education.

Throughout the 1960's and into the 1970's, the nation concentrated on access models - the removal of obstacles to being about equality of educational opportunity. Federal and state policies moved steadily and effectively toward lowering the financial barriers to a college education. Recognizing the limitations of the access model, educational and political leaders have worked hard to devise and support remedial model-programs and services that make access more than a hollow victory for those whose background prevent full utilization of the opportunities newly wom (Cross, 1976).

Although remediation efforts have helped students to keep up with the demands of an advanced society for larger numbers, they offer no assurance of improving the relative position of the lower classes through education. In other words, the "redediation model" - like the "access model" - offer only a partial solution. Both models have operated on the procedural fringes of the higher education enterprise; they have not penetrated into the instructional core.

Patricia Cross (1976), in examining programs designed to increase access for minorities and underachivers, notes that what started as a simple approach to equality through lowering the access barriers to colleges has turned into an educational revolution involving all of higher education. The revolution has reached the heart of the educational enterprise - the instructional process itself. New teaching methods are taking place across the broad spectrum of higher education, not just in classrooms where New Students (minorities, women, and adult students) are present.

In individual classrooms as well as in the total systems of education, individuals are taught as though they were a homogenous group: "Too often we have carried the academic lockstep into each individual course, meeting classes faithfully three times every week, giving the same assignments to every student, treating each student exactly the same in the interest of fairness".

A critical challenge to the academic lockstep at the college level came when open admissions greatly increased the range of individual differences in the entering classes. The initial reaction to that shock to our educational system was to organize remedial programs whose mission was to change the newcomers so that they would fit the requirements of traditional institutions. Apparently, in the beginning, little attention was given to changing institutions so they would fit the needs of the new learners.

While there is evidence that New Students are being absorbed into the college mainstream, the data from Patricia Cross's Beyond the Open Door, showed that New Students differ in significant ways from

traditional college students. The combination of the two conclusions, drawn from the research, suggests that attitudes and teaching styles have probably changed to accomodate the learning needs of New Students. The speed with which individualized programs of instruction have been adopted is one sign of the instructional revolution.

The challenge to traditional ways of thinking about education is another indicator. Mastery learning is the revolutionary concept that lies at the heart of the new teaching strategies. Simply stated, Mastery learning permits all students to learn to the same high level of achievement regardless of the time required.

Traditional education permits the level of attainment to vary while the amount of time is perceived as a constant across the group of learners. Thus we have turned out students who are well educated and those who are not, but all have spent the same amount of time is perceived as a constant across the group of learners. Thus we have turned out students who are well educated and those who are not, but all have spent the same amount of time at the task - surely a meaningless measure of education. Our grading system does not solve the problem; it just acknowledges that some students learned a lot in the time specified and received A's while other learned little and received D's and F's.

If the assertion is correct, that anyone can learn a subject to mastery if given adequate time and appropriate help, thus we have a breakthrough that permits us to provide for individual differences through holding attainment constant and letting time vary.

The introduction of mastery learning solves two major problems for egalitarian education. It gives New Students some experience with high

achievement in school work, and it speaks to those concerned about the erosion of academic standards. There is no compromise with standards when every student masters the material he has studied.

Mastery learning has been observed as the critical missing link in the education of low achievers. It's advantages are both cognitive and affective: (1) It lays a foundation for future learning by insisting that one unit must be mastered before the student may proceed to subsequent learning; (2) It demonstrates to poor students that they are capable of doing good work. To most of the New Students in higher education, these two critically important experiences are missing from traditional education.

Three characteristics of traditional education post barriers to large numbers of people. First, the notion that learning requires physical presence in the classroom restricts access for those with physical handicaps, those in geographically remote areas, and those who are temporarily or permanently confined--for example, prison inmates and mothers of small children. Second, the concept that it is the accumulation of credit hours that fulfills degree requirements handicaps those whose lives dictate a mobility too great to collect sufficient credits at a single degree-granting institution--servicemen, business transfers, wives leaving college before the completion of their own degrees. Finally, the idea that education is the learner's major activity and that it customarily takes place between 9 A.M. and 5 P.M. on working days creates scheduling problems for large numbers of part-time learners.

Geographical Barriers. Numerically, the largest group of people denied access to postsecondary education because of limitations related to their physical presence on campus are those who are handicapped by geographical remoteness. In rural areas, distance may be measured in miles and the lack public transportation, but in many urban areas congestion makes commuting to a college a time-consuming task that must often compete with full-time jobs and family responsibilities.

The physically handicapped and prison inmates have ample time for study and many have the desire to participate in substantial programs of education. Although more than 100,000 persons leave federal and state prisons each year, few of them receive the kind of training, while in prison, that enables them to compete successfully for jobs. Two thirds of the prison population are under 35 years of age, and most adult prisoners are school dropouts (Collins and Weisberg, 1966).

Society is just beginning to recognize the very important role that education can play in the lives of people whose access to opportunity is inhibited by their inability to get to the campus, and yet very few institutions have attempted to take education to the student.

Barrier of "Accumulating Credits." Let us look now at the other extreme of the mobility handicap. Servicemen and women constitute a large group of potential students whose frequent moves interfere with the accumulation of degree credits. Their handicap is created by the notion that a single educational institution must be responsible for certifying that their learning adds up to a degree.

The number of people who experience difficulty in credentialing their knowledge has been documented as being quite large, and there is

obvious interest in seeking a solution to the problem. In the six-month period from January through June of 1971, the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) received over 146,000 requests for information about taking examinations for college credit. By June, the CLEP office was receiving 2,500 requests per week for information. This wave of interest was generated by an effort simply informing people that a channel existed for converting knowledge to academic credits.

Among the many thousands of people who are experiencing difficulty with credentialing are those who study outside of traditional educational agencies; those whose life circumstances prohibit their remaining in one place long enough for credits to add up to a degree; and those who credits are "too old" to apply to a degree. The latter situation is especially common among older married women, who may have left college in their youth to marry or have families or because they moved from the community upon the completion of their husbands' degrees. Many of these women, ready to enter the labor market, would like to apply for jobs that offer a challenge to their intellectual abilities, but they are constantly thwarted by employers' stipulations of degree requirements.

Scheduling Barriers. Finally, let us look at examples of groups of people handicapped by the assumption that education is a full-time activity taking place largely between the hours of 9 A.M. to 5 P.M. on weekdays. Scheduling is a problem for almost anyone who wishes to combine educational activities with other adult responsibilities. The most common reasons for enrolling in adult study are job-related. Thus, it is not surprising that almost 75 percent of all participants in adult study are in the labor force, and 62 percent of them are employed full

time. These figures represent huge numbers of people who have shown an obvious desire to pursue formal learning activities outside of what is considered "regular" class hours. But full-time employees are not the only members of the learning force to face scheduling problems. Married women, with and without children, constitute another large market for part-time study in "off" hours.

Financial Barriers. Scheduling is not the only problem faced by adults who cannot make formal education a full-time activity. Although, according to one survey of 750 colleges and universities, 95 percent "offer opportunities for mature women to complete degrees," Mattfeld (1971). Other studies point out that only 49 percent of these made any concessions in rate of work, class hours, or customary academic policies or practices to fit the needs of mature women. Many institutions even have fee schedules wherein excessively high unit costs for part-time study close the door to thousands of potential students. Johnstone and Rivera (1965) report in their study the problem of finances (although most serious for younger adults with growing families) was mentioned more frequently than any other by adults of all ages who were classified as having high motivation for participation in part-time study.

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND INTERESTS TODAY

All of the barriers discussed have the effect of limiting access to existing educational opportunities. Removal of such barriers is one way to improve access; but unless education offers what potential students want to learn, the removal of barriers will not result in improved access.

The reasons people give for pursuing formal learning vary with age, sex, socioeconomic status, past educational achievement, and a host of other variables that change as personal and social conditions change. Technological unemployment will necessitate formal study for others. The potential for new career opportunities will attract groups, such as ethnic minorities and women, whose education has failed to make much difference in the past. Rising educational requirements are facing employees in business and in government. Some employees seek educational credentials to compete with younger, better-educated employees; some need new learning to handle the increasing complexity of their jobs; some need certification to meet newly legislated educational requirements.

Likewise, the reasons for continued learning vary from group to group. Job-centered reasons are primary among younger people, whereas the goals of older adults are much less pragmatic and utilitarian. In 1961, when the study was conducted, men were more likely than women to express vocational motivations; today, however, education for job advancement may play an increasingly important role in the educational motivations of women. Socioeconomic status is also an important variable in educational motivation. Men and women from lower socio-economic levels are much more likely to take courses to prepare for new jobs than to advance in present ones, whereas the opposite is true for those from higher socioeconomic levels.

Learning for work and learning for leisure may play equally important roles in the decades ahead. Researchers predict an adult education boom for the 1970's and 1980's that is comparable to the expansion of regular school enrollments in the 1950's and 1960's. As the nation becomes better educated, the needs and desires of individuals and of the society will create untold demands for new and meaningful choices in education.

We must being now to make realistic plans for increasing access to educational opportunity to meet the inevitable demand. The removal of existing barriers and the development of relevant new programs are two essential steps in making educational opportunity available to a broader segment of the population. A systematic program of research and development will be necessary to guide the implementation of non-traditional studies. The "adequacy" of existing opportunities can be judged, of course, only in relationship to the needs of people; and, as we have seen, needs and desires for particular kinds of learning opportunities vary enormously with the characteristics of the individual and the changes taking place in the broader society. Thus, research on needs and interests should be continuous to monitor a rapidly changing society, and it needs to take special cognizance of the differing educational needs of subgroups in the population.

DESCRIPTION OF COLLEGE II PROGRAM

The Program has the responsibility for structuring, coordinating, monitoring and evaluating the learning program for those students combining this unconventional route to the baccalaureate with traditional studies. It enlarges the faculty to include knowledgeable people from outside the academic world and makes use of modern technology. It places strong emphasis on student self-direction, while recognizing and providing for the special needs of the educationally and economically disadvantaged.

The Program will require all students to develop their skills in reading, speaking, and writing so that they may do these clearly, correctly, and effectively. Students are likewise expected to master whatever competencies may be essential to their degree programs.

The Program will require all students, whatever studies they undertake, to gain a basic knowledge of facts, theories, and methods appropriate to those studies. Comprehensive knowledge of facts, theories, and methods does not just mean the capacity to repeat from memory, but also the longer capacity to translate what is known into different terms, to interpret, and to extrapolate.

Beyond knowledge of facts, theories, and methods, there is the expectation that students be able to develope analytical skills. Different subjects of inquiry have different methods of analysis. Mastery of an area of inquiry likewise requires that the students learn to make evaluations based on appropriate criteria.

Beyond knowledge and skill analysis and evaluation, the Program expects students to be able to work creatively in the fields of inquiry they enter, and to be able to synthesize and combine elements in a new order. In different fields this process might entail such activities as forming a new hypothesis, designing a new experiment, creating a work of art, solving a problem or developing a new theory, generalization, or principles. Students also must demonstrate the ability to apply what they have learned to practical and concrete situations.

The student's learning program may include a range of learning resources including independent study and interships. The faculty advisor serves in the capacity of helping the student to coordinate his

degree plans from the University offerings. Students enrolled in the Special Services Program (College II) will have the option of designing their program around traditional and non-traditional experiences. For all learning experiences, including those arranged through regular courses, the student negotiates learning contracts.

SIX STAGE MODEL FOR ASSESSMENT

The Six Stage Model for Assessment of Prior Learning is commonly referred to as Experiential Learning. Six stages of assessment have been derived from a body of accumulated judgments in the field of Independent Study.[1] It is important to focus on these six stages and delineate responsibility for their completion, in order to avoid a large amount of error in the end product which should be a valid and quantifiable verbal statement that places some value on the learning assimilated by the student as a result of prior experience.

1. Identify the types of learning or competencies acquired through life experience or some type of learning or competency incorporated in an institutionally sponsored program of experiential learning. This is a critical stage for the assessment of experiential learning since the first requirement is to know what competencies and skills are to be assessed. It is also a critical and typically very difficult step for students seeking for learning prior to enrollment.

This step is largely the student's responsibility and may be initiated and accomplished by a catalogue search.

2. Articulate such learning or competence to the educational goals or academic degree of the student. Some institutions may recognize exceptions, but in most instances the validity of a learning experience for credit purposes depends upon a demonstrated relationship to an accepted educational goal.

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[1]W. Willingham, R. Burns, and T. Donlon, Current Practices in the Assessment of Experiential Learning, pp. 41-43.

Because Morgan State University empasizes awarding credit or recognition for learning outcomes as competenciers rather than experiences per se, this will be a larger part of the student's portfolio. For each competency claimed the student will have to describe what experiences contributed to his/her present level of competency. The purpose of this stage is to let the assessment committee know where the student stands at the present in terms of knowledge, skills and values.

3. Document the fact that the student has in fact participated in such a learning experience. Documenting a learning experience prior to enrollment may take many forms: certificates, letters, licenses, etc.

Here again, the student must be responsible for this stage and place the actual documentation and reports in the appendix of his portfolio. (Copies to be filed in the College II and Departmental Office).

4. Measure the extent and character of the knowledge or skill required. (Departmental Assessment)

This is the one stage of the six that actually involves some form of quantification, though that quantification may or may not involve any type of instrument. However, whenever instruments are involved, the content, quality and usage, must be clearly understood by all involved, i.e., those to be assessed and the accessors.

5. Evaluate whether the knowledge or skill meets an acceptable standard and how much credit and/or recognition is awarded. Evaluation is not always distinct from measuring since measuring sometimes simply involves comparing a student's accomplishment with previously evaluated standards, but often measuring and evaluating are distinct stages expecially in the sense that evaluation implies some judgment as to how much the learning is worth in academic currency.

6. Transcript the credit or other appropriate description of the learning and its assessment. Even when a specific amount of academic credit is awarded for experiential learning, the credit must be described on the student's permanent record in a way that is fair and equitable and in a way that communicates to interested persons what the credit represents.

LEARNING CONTRACTS

A learning contract is a plan for learning covering a particular period of time. It is negotiated by the student and his advisor, and the Special Services staff. It describes the long-range and short-range goals of the student, the means he will use, what will do and what he will produce, and how and on what basis his work will be evaluated.

The contract describes the rights and responsibilities of both student and advisor for a period within the student's degree program. It will be the responsibility of the academic departments to play a supportive role in the development of the contract beyond the orientation and development stage.

A learning contract involves independent study under the guidance of the adjunct faculty member, program coordinator, or field expert, or it may involve taking a formal course on the campus. It includes working with modules, or a media course designed for self-study. The student may elect to work on a cooperative project with fellow students in doing independent research.

The student has the opportunity to combine his learning experiences through the Special Services Program with traditional courses.

SPECIAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS

Students accepted into the Special Services Program have different needs than the traditional undergraduate student entering college. College II students generally includes people who are somewhat older than the

typical entering student and have found it necessary to have to work part-time or are currently working to meet additional family responsibilities.

Our experience with College II has shown that they have unique difficulties in the following areas: writing papers, reading comprehension, study skills and general adjustment to the student role. Consequently, a program to help these highly motivated students build their self-confidence and self-image seem appropriate for the total success of College II at Morgan State University.